

Social Media: Why Every Business Needs It

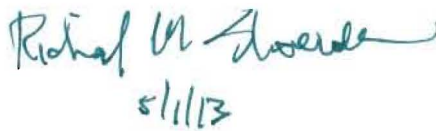
An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

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5/1/13

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2013

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2013

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Abstract

Social media has become an integral part of the business world over the past few years. Each social media platform provides unique and innovative ways to promote a product or business and to expand target markets. No matter what the business or organization is or who their target audiences are, every business can benefit from the correct use of social media. I analyzed the current social media plan for my local church, St. Paul United Church of Christ, and then created and implemented a new plan based on previous experience with social media in the business world. I then analyzed the current and future success of this new plan and provided guidelines to creating a general tactical plan for a social media campaign.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Richard Shoemaker for advising me during this project, as well as through the past four years. He has contributed much to my education both through this project and in the classroom.

I also would like to thank Pastor Bob and the Consistory at St. Paul United Church of Christ for allowing me to complete this project. Pastor Bob Goddard, Pastor Kris Avise-Rouse and Barb Gerstenecker also helped to provide crucial information over the course of this project.

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Author's Statement

Social media is a dynamic force that truly is changing the world. People today like their information short and to the point, and they want it now. Social media platforms allow this fast and continuous flow of information to happen.

Today, there are billions of people using these sites worldwide. Facebook reported in October of 2012 that one billion people around the world use Facebook per month, and this number is only getting bigger (The Associated Press). According to the Pew Research Center, 67% of Americans were using at least one social media site as of December 2012 (Brenner).

The question is: how can social media benefit businesses? As long as businesses and organizations use these sites correctly, social media can actually not only grow an audience, but also establish a positive reputation and help maintain relationships with this audience as well. The basic sites are also relatively inexpensive, creating a high return on investment for businesses. The key is to understand how these sites work and how to utilize them appropriately for a specific business and its target audience.

In this project, I plan to demonstrate how social media correctly can be used to benefit a business. I created and implemented a social media tactical plan for my local church, St. Paul United Church of Christ (UCC) in Columbia, IL. I also have worked as a social media intern for a travel agency and a clothing company, and have worked with

social media accounts for various clients at an agency. Each organization required different strategies and tactics, but the overall objectives were the same.

The first overall objective for any social media campaign should be to establish a reputation as a positive and reliable digital source for audience members. The second is to promote a two-way conversation and to maintain interaction with the audience. The key to any successful campaign is engaging the audience. It is also important to establish ways to measure the reach of the message and to educate all members of the organization who will be using social media.

The structure of the campaign is crucial as well. It is important to establish key messages and one or multiple target audiences before selecting specific strategies and tactics to focus on. These portions of the campaign can be determined through initial research of the company and its overall goals.

I have been involved with this church since before I can remember, so I was able to develop these aspects of the campaign with little outside research. I did, however, look over the social media pages for other churches and nonprofit organizations. Other campaigns, such as the travel agency, required me to delve a little deeper. I took my time to get to know the organization and interview the clients to determine what it was that they were seeking.

The target audiences, or key publics, should be determined from this initial research. Key publics are the groups of people that the company intends to reach and interact with through the various social media platforms. The key publics for St. Paul UCC include current members and youth, prospective members and youth, citizens of Columbia

and nonprofit affiliates of the church. These publics will vary greatly between each organization.

The campaign also will include a list of key messages that each strategy and tactic should link back to. These key messages are developed from, and should be similar to, the overall goals of the organization. For example, St. Paul's overall mission is that it is "the church with open doors and open arms," so the first key message developed made it clear that the church is welcoming and open to all people.

The church also makes an effort to reach out to all youth in the community. There are a variety of youth activities available and they are open to any youth in the area, not just members of the church. Therefore, the second key message is that St. Paul is a great place for youth to interact and have fun in a positive environment.

The third key message centers around the events that the church holds. There are always a variety of events and activities for people of all ages to take part in year-round, so this key message is that St. Paul promotes involvement in the church through a variety of events, committees and organizations.

From the target publics, the key messages and the overall objectives stated above, one should determine a set of objectives developed specifically for the organization. The three objectives developed for the church can be found in the attached tactical plan. The first is to continue to build a positive digital reputation with the church's key publics. The second is to improve interaction and maintain engagement with the key publics. The third objective is to educate the church staff in using the selected social media platforms.

After these elements are established in the campaign, strategies and tactics are developed to support and implement the objectives. A strategy is an overall plan of action, such as hosting a social media contest. Tactics are details explaining how each strategy will be developed and implemented. A full list of the strategies and tactics created for this campaign can be found in the attached tactical plan.

The first objective, establishing a positive digital reputation with the key publics, features a variety of strategies and tactics that I have put in place to reach this objective. These strategies include creating and building social media platforms, connecting with current members of the congregation and youth groups and connecting with community businesses, other UCC churches and church affiliates. The tactics break down these strategies and provide specific methods to reach the objectives.

The second objective, improving interaction and maintaining engagement, features strategies with events and contests that will help further involve users of social media. The first strategy is to promote all special events occurring at the church and its affiliates. The second is to increase interaction between the church pastors and staff and the key publics, and the third is to start and maintain a two-way conversation with these publics. The fourth strategy is to host a contest across social media in order to engage all users. Again, as in the first objective, all tactics are created to support the objective and strategies and can be found in the attached tactical plan.

The third and final objective listed in this plan is crucial for this specific client. This objective is to educate the St. Paul staff in using various social media platforms for future needs. The strategies supporting this objective include creating an instructional booklet

and hosting a social media workshop for employees interested in learning more about social media. I have hosted a social media workshop in the past for various clients and they have been successful, which is why I would like to implement this strategy for this group as well. I have attached the booklet that I will use during this workshop.

The final part of the plan should list how the organization will be able to evaluate the success of the plan in the future. This evaluation portion of the plan should list various methods to utilize when determining the reach of the message presented on each social media platform. This part of the plan is important because it allows an organization to determine how to move forward and what needs to be changed to reach the objectives listed.

The next step is implementation. There are various stages to the implementation process, and not all can happen at once. It takes time to build an audience, especially if a business is starting from scratch with any of the social media platforms presented in the plan. St. Paul did not have a Twitter or a blog account prior to the creation of this plan, and it may take a few months to build a following on these sites.

It is important to create a calendar in order to organize and plan out various posts. How much a business needs to post will vary on a weekly basis, but it is crucial to post multiple times a week in order to maintain a conversation with the audience. One simple way to ensure that posts are generated frequently and on time is to use scheduling software, such as Tweet Deck or Hoot Suite. Creating a social media calendar and an important events calendar is also a tactic to consider using when planning and organizing

posts. I have attached a week-long social media calendar that I used for the church's campaign as an example, but there are many different forms of this calendar available.

The most important thing about social media, however, are the posts themselves. It is crucial that each post helps reach the overall objectives set in the tactical plan. There are many dos and don'ts to posting on various platforms, a list of which can be found in the attached instructional booklet. The number one thing to remember is to always maintain a two-way conversation. This can happen in a number of ways. A call to action is one of the best ways to involve audience members in a conversation. This call to action usually comes at the beginning of a post and asks audience members to "click here" or "join us." Calls to action can also come in the form of questions that allow the audience to start a discussion.

Posts should also be kept as short as possible, and photos and videos are a plus. As stated at the beginning, people today enjoy getting their news as quickly as possible. This is easy with the 140 character limit on Twitter, but blogs and Facebook status posts should be kept short as well.

Part of maintaining this conversation is to monitor each page at least once a day. Businesses need to establish a reputation as a positive and reliable source, meaning that all questions must be answered as quickly and efficiently as possible. This shows audience members that businesses are active and engaged.

Growing an audience is key throughout any social media campaign. This can be done in multiple ways. Many organizations simply place social media icons on all promotional materials and on their website. I am aiming to place the icons in the church's monthly newsletter, in the pamphlets handed out at services and on the church website. I

have also written an email that will be sent out to each member of the congregation. This email tactic is great for organizations such as the church that have a large database of emails for the target audience. I have attached a copy of this email as an example.

Connecting each platform to the company website, if one exists, is a way to direct the audience to a location with more information about the business. This can be done by placing the website address in the “about” sections on each homepage. Posts can also be generated by posting something directly from the company’s website. When an audience member goes to click on the post, they will be directed to the website. This will allow the company to maintain the audience member’s attention. This tactic is especially crucial for businesses with an ecommerce website, such as the clothing store I interned for. The posts I generated for this company included new products available, my personal favorites and more, each one with a direct link to the website.

It also is important to evaluate the success and reach of each post on a weekly basis. As stated above, this should be a set portion of the plan. The attached tactical plan features the evaluation portion below the listed strategies and tactics.

Facebook provides Insights for each page and for every single post. Twitter does not have analytics set up, but it is easy to determine new followers, which tweets were favorited or re-tweeted by followers and how many times a hashtag was used. Blog sites such as WordPress have their own analytics set up and are simple to use.

These analytics can be used to determine multiple statistics for each site. Facebook allows administrators for each page to view all previous posts and the reach of each post, as well as the date and time that each post was posted. WordPress analytics and

scheduling sites such as Hoot Suite also allow businesses to view this information as well. This allows businesses to track the times that audience members tend to view posts. Businesses can then schedule posts at these times in the future. For example, fans of the St. Paul page tend to view posts between 11 a.m. and noon and again at around 4 and 5 p.m. each day.

These Insights also allow users to see which posts did and did not attract attention by looking at the viral levels and clicks on each post. Facebook also provides graphs that show the fluctuation of fans that viewed the page and are talking about the page on a weekly basis. I have attached these graphs in order to further illustrate how they can be utilized.

I have begun to implement this campaign and will continue to work with it into the future. While all of the objectives have not yet been reached, I believe that the continuous implementation of the provided strategies and tactics will help the church's social media expand and grow over time.

By evaluating the reach on each site, the overall reach of St. Paul UCC's message has grown since I began implementing the campaign. According to Facebook Insights, the St. Paul page has gained 13 new likes in the two months that I have been posting. Although this may not seem like much, the overall reach per week has climbed to well over 1,000 in the past month, something that has not happened in the history of this page.

The WordPress blog and Twitter pages have not generated as many followers as I had hoped, but each page is only a month old at this point. St. Paul should continue to use

these platforms, but the effectiveness of these sites should be re-evaluated over the next few months to determine if the continuing usage of these sites is necessary.

Not all social media sites are appropriate for all businesses and target audiences. Sometimes, this can be determined through research. Other times, a trial-and-error period may need to take place, such as in this situation. It is important to continue to evaluate the success of each page and each post to determine if a business needs to be spending time on specific platforms.

Tactical plans, such as the one created for St. Paul UCC, are used as guidelines for businesses. These strategies and tactics can be expanded upon and changed depending on the situation and the success of current posts. Social media is always changing, creating a need for dynamic social media plans.

If social media is used correctly, and is continuously evaluated and monitored, businesses can benefit from it. Maintaining a digital two-way conversation is the key to any successful page, no matter what the topic or who the target audience is.

Sources

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Brenner, Joanna. "Pew Internet: Social Networking (full detail)." *Pew Internet*. Pew Research Center, 14 Feb 2013. Web. 22 Apr 2013. <<http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/March/Pew-Internet-Social-Networking-full-detail.asp&xgt;>>.

Social Media Sites

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaUCC?ref=hl>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ColumbiaUCC>

Blog: <http://columbiastpaulucc.wordpress.com/>

Social Media Tactical Plan

St. Paul United Church of Christ, Columbia, Ill.

Spring 2013

Objectives

This plan includes strategies and tactics to be used to accomplish the following social media objectives:

Objective 1: To establish a positive digital reputation with key publics through the development and implementation of this plan across various social media platforms.

Objective 2: To improve interaction and maintain engagement between the social media platforms and the key publics.

Objective 3: To educate UCC staff in using social media platforms for future needs.

Key Publics:

Public 1: Current members of St. Paul UCC Columbia

Public 2: Current youth of St. Paul UCC Columbia

Public 3: Prospective members of St. Paul UCC Columbia

Public 4: Prospective youth of St. Paul UCC Columbia

Public 5: Citizens of Columbia, Ill. and the surrounding area.

Public 6: St. Paul UCC Columbia non profit affiliates such as Hoyleton

Key Messages:

1. St. Paul United Church of Christ in Columbia, Ill. is a welcoming church open to all people
2. St. Paul United Church of Christ is a great place for youth to interact and have fun in a positive environment
3. St. Paul United Church of Christ encourages involvement through a variety of events, committees and youth and adult organizations.

Objective 1: To establish a positive reputation with key publics through the development and implementation of this plan across various social media platforms.

- Strategy 1: Create and build social media platforms to provide key publics with a credible source of information
 - Tactic 1: Improve the St. Paul UCC Facebook page
 - Tactic 2: Create a Twitter account for St. Paul UCC
 - Tactic 3: Create a blog for St. Paul UCC and connect it to Facebook and Twitter
 - Tactic 4: Create a schedule for consistent posts across all platforms to establish a reputation as an up-to-date and reliable source

- Strategy 2: Connect with current members of the congregation and youth groups
 - Tactic 1: Include social media platform URLs on service programs, monthly pathfinders and other materials that are distributed to members and youth
 - Tactic 2: Encourage word-of-mouth promotion by announcing the new social media platforms during services and at meetings.
 - Tactic 3: Reach out to current members who are connected to the Facebook page and ask them to reach out to friends and family

- Strategy 3: Connect with community businesses, other Illinois South Conference (ISC) UCC churches and the regional and national UCC churches and their affiliates
 - Tactic 1: Reach out to businesses in the community about special events and ask them for their help in promotion
 - Tactic 2: Reach out to ISC UCC churches for connections. Offer to promote their events in exchange for promotion of St Paul Columbia events.
 - Tactic 3: Reach out to the regional and national UCC about promoting St. Paul Columbia
 - Tactic 4: Reach out and connect to UCC affiliates through likes, follows and other forms of interaction on social media sites
 - Tactic 5: Ask outside affiliates such as non profits to write guest blogs
 - Tactic 6: Re-tweet and share appropriate information and events from business, church and affiliate pages

Objective 2: To improve interaction and maintain engagement between the social media platforms and the key publics

- Strategy 1: Promote special events and meetings through social media platforms
 - Tactic 1: Create event pages on Facebook and invite current members and youth
 - Tactic 2: Encourage members to invite prospective youth and members to events
 - Tactic 3: Promote events before, during and after the event through information, stories and photos on all platforms
 - Tactic 4: Encourage participation with various groups such as chorus, handbells, after school crew and youth fellowship through event posts, photos and blogs

- Strategy 2: Increase interaction between church pastors and staff and the key publics
 - Tactic 1: Post monthly Pathfinder articles written by pastors and staff on the blog
 - Tactic 2: Include biographies on pastors and staff on Facebook and the blog

- Strategy 3: Start and maintain a two-way conversation with the publics
 - Tactic 1: Create and promote custom hashtags for St. Paul UCC Columbia, Ill. (#StPaulColumbia)
 - Tactic 2: Maintain and monitor pages on a regular basis and answer all questions
 - Tactic 3: Create interesting and thought-provoking blog posts and allow followers to comment

- Strategy 4: Host a contest across social media platforms that will engage all users
 - Tactic 1: Enter a short post or a photograph on what faith, St Paul, community, etc. means to you
 - Tactic 2: Allow users to vote on their favorite posts or photographs
 - Tactic 3: Winning posts and photographs will be featured across social media, in the Pathfinder, in the program, etc.

- Strategy 5: Provide users with an easy way to donate to the church online
 - Tactic 1: Post link to online donations
 - Tactic 2: Create blog post with directions on how to donate online

Objective 3: To educate UCC staff in using social media platforms for future needs.

- Strategy 1: Create an instructional booklet to pass on to future social media posters
 - Tactic 1: Include passwords and usernames for each site and how to log on to each site
 - Tactic 2: Include basics of how to use each site
 - Tactic 3: Include basics of how to use analytics for each site
 - Tactic 4: Include previous post schedules
- Strategy 2: Host a social media workshop for those employees interested in learning more about social media and how to use it

Methods of Evaluation

- Monitor each platform on a weekly basis to determine the reach and effectiveness of each post
 - Measure Facebook impressions through built-in Facebook Insights
 - Measure blog visits through built-in analytics on wordpress.com
 - Measure Twitter impressions through analytics recorded from Hoot Suite or TweetDeck

4/22 – 4/28	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekend
<p>Facebook Social Media:</p> <p>Always search to find a post from others</p>	<p>Monitor last week's posts</p> <p>National Volunteer Week!</p> <p>Earth Day!</p>	<p>National Volunteer Week</p>	<p>National Volunteer Week</p>	<p>National Volunteer Week</p>	<p>Monitor this week's posts</p> <p>National Volunteer Week</p>	<p>- Schedule updates for special events</p>
<p>Facebook:</p> <p>Post at least 3 posts per week</p> <p>Re-post blogs here</p>	<p>- Thank you to volunteers</p> <p>- Happy Earth Day!</p> <p>- Mission 4/1</p>	<p>- Have you followed us on Twitter yet?</p> <p>(Link)</p>	<p>Blog post</p>	<p>Volunteer video</p>	<p>Blog post</p> <p>Prompt audience to volunteer over the weekend</p>	<p>It's a beautiful Sunday morning to worship!</p>
<p>Blog:</p> <p>Post at least 1 per week</p> <p>100– 500 words</p>			<p>It's Easy to Volunteer</p>		<p>Why I Volunteer</p>	
<p>Twitter:</p> <p>Post 5–10 tweets per week</p> <p>Link blog to twitter</p>	<p>#National...</p> <p>What do you do to volunteer?</p> <p>-Mission 4/1</p>	<p>Let's take this past 140 characters. Follow us on Facebook!</p> <p>(Link)</p>	<p>Blog post</p>	<p>Volunteer video</p>	<p>Blog post</p> <p>Prompt audience to volunteer over the weekend</p>	<p>It's a gorgeous day! This is the day that the Lord hath made!</p>

Sample Email Marketing

Subject: Join St Paul UCC in spreading the faith online

(Insert name here):

St. Paul UCC of Columbia is taking some exciting steps forward online. We invite you to join us on our multiple social media platforms. These sites feature information about our church and our community, special events, news and, of course, a whole lot of faith. By following us, you will have exclusive access to information, photos, videos and more that we only post to these sites.

We have expanded our social media range to include not only Facebook, but Twitter and a WordPress blog as well. These online communities allow us to share in our faith no matter where you are in the world. Find the links to these pages below and join us today!

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaUCC?ref=hl>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ColumbiaUCC>

Blog: <http://columbiastpaulucc.wordpress.com/>

Instructional Social Media Booklet

St. Paul United Church of Christ

Columbia, IL

May 2013

Overall Point: Social media is a continuous two-way conversation

Three Steps of Social Media:

1. Research
 - a. Crucial to any social media campaign
 - b. Develop target audience
 - c. Develop overall objectives
 - d. Develop key strategies and tactics
 - e. Consider key trends and influencers
2. Implementation
 - a. Tailor messages for your target audience
 - b. Use each platform the way it was meant to be used
 - c. Integrate multiple platforms
 - d. Maintain a two-way conversation with the audience at all times
 - e. Encourage feedback
3. Evaluation
 - a. Evaluation is crucial to measuring the reach of the message
 - b. Utilize Facebook Insights, WordPress Insights and track hashtags, favorites and retweets

Overall Social Media Tips

1. DO engage users continuously
 - a. Always maintain a two-way conversation
 - b. Ask questions in posts with a “call to action”

- c. Host contests to encourage users to participate
 - d. Answer all questions in a timely manner
- 2. DO post multiple times a week
- 3. DO NOT over-post
 - a. If an organization posts too much in one day, followers tend to become annoyed. This applies more to Facebook than to Twitter.
- 4. DO NOT use copy-heavy content
 - a. Keep each message as short and to the point as possible
 - b. Photos and videos add personality to a page
- 5. DO monitor posts on a regular basis
 - a. Answer all questions in a timely manner
 - i. If you do not know the answer, direct the consumer to someone who does, never guess or give out false information
 - b. Block spam posts
- 6. DO NOT delete negative comments
 - a. Always answer and ask further questions as to why the consumer is upset
 - b. One exception: foul or derogatory language
- 7. DO establish a social media policy concerning negative posts
 - a. Having a set policy in place allows the social media representative to act quickly in both positive and negative situations

The image is a screenshot of the Facebook homepage in a web browser. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'https://www.facebook.com/?_fb_n=1'. The Facebook logo is prominently displayed on the left. To the right of the logo, there are input fields for 'Email or Phone' and 'Password', along with a 'Log In' button. Below the login fields, there are checkboxes for 'Keep me logged in' and 'Forgot your password?'. The main content area on the left features the text 'Connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook.' followed by three icons and their descriptions: a photo icon for 'See photos and updates from friends in News Feed.', a star icon for 'Share what's new in your life on your Timeline.', and a search icon for 'Find more of what you're looking for with Graph Search.'. On the right side, the 'Sign Up' section is visible, with the text 'It's free and always will be.' followed by input fields for 'First Name', 'Last Name', 'Your Email', 'Re-enter Email', and 'New Password'. Below these fields are 'Birthday' dropdowns for 'Month', 'Day', and 'Year', and radio buttons for 'Female' and 'Male'. A small note at the bottom of the sign-up section states: 'By clicking Sign Up, you agree to our Terms and that you have read our Data Use Policy, including our Cookie Use.'

Facebook: www.facebook.com

Log-in: personal

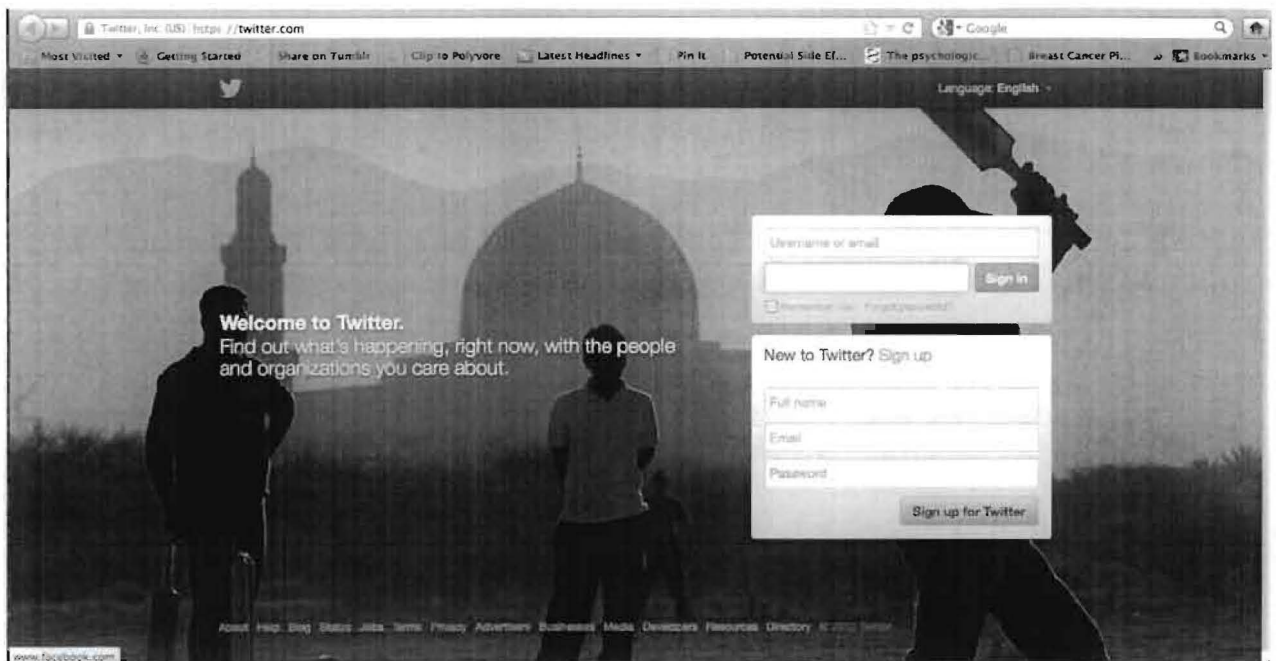
Password: personal

Specific Instructions: Click on symbol in the upper right corner to access the drop-down menu that lists the organization's page.

Facebook Tips

1. Keep the message short and sweet
2. Utilize a clear “call to action”
 - a. Encourages audience members to either click on the post to learn more or to comment on a post
3. Photo and video-heavy content
 - a. No one wants to read paragraphs of information
 - b. Videos and photos are more effective than words in most cases
4. The Cover Photo is extremely important to Facebook right now
5. Utilize Facebook Insights to determine the reach of the message per post and per an expanse of time





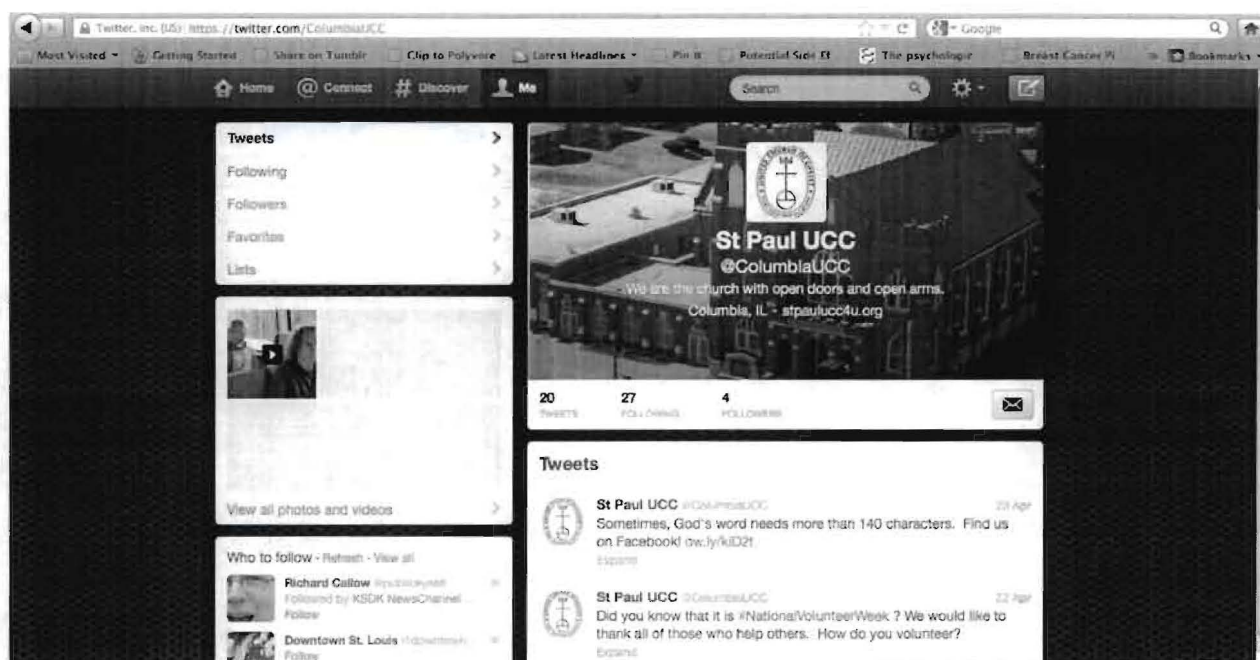
Twitter: www.twitter.com

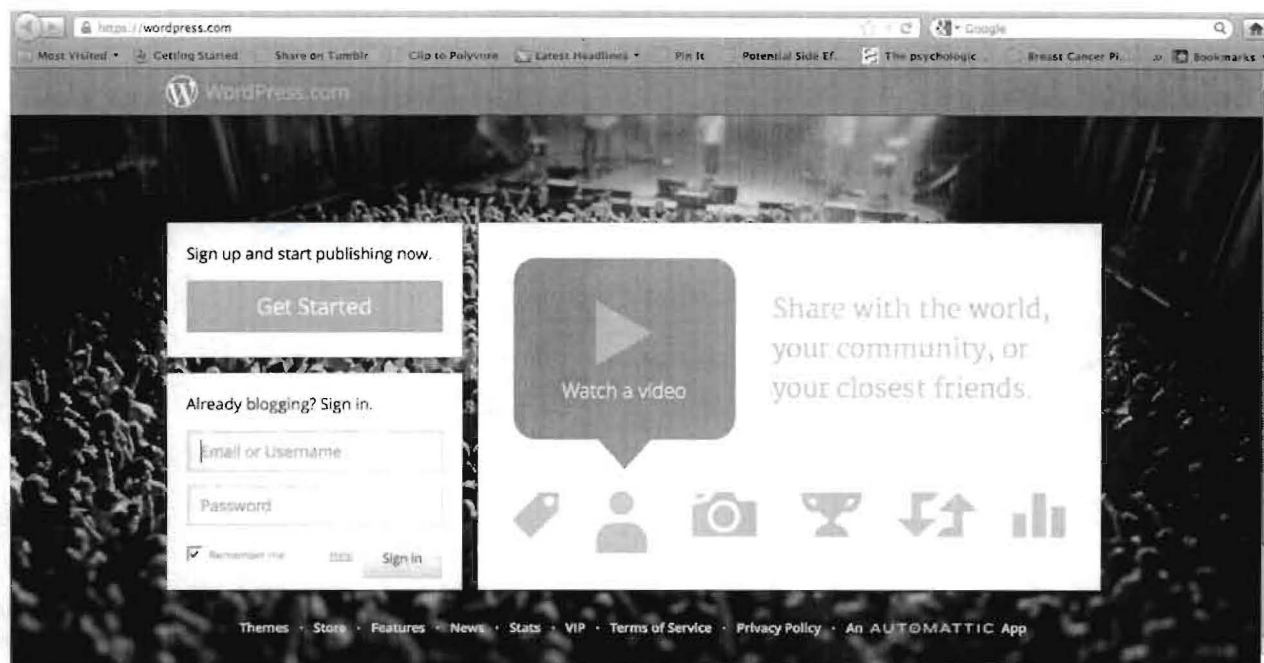
Log-In: stpaulucc4u@gmail.com

Password: *****

Twitter Tips

1. 140 characters maximum
 - a. Tweet with 120 or less to allow for edits and retweets by followers
2. Acknowledge followers for follows, retweets, favorites, etc.
3. Follow relevant accounts to your organization
4. Utilize hashtags (#) to allow followers to search and start conversations





WordPress Blog: www.wordpress.com

Username: stpaulucc4u@gmail.com

Password: *****

Blog Tips

1. Just because you have as much space as you want does not mean you should use as much space as you want
 - a. Make an effort to keep blogs to a 200-500 word limit
2. Post videos and photos with commentary
3. Posts should be left open with a question to prompt followers to respond
4. Post about anything
 - a. Blogs let you have a little fun
 - b. Make sure everything can be connected to your business, but you don't have to necessarily mention your business in every post
5. Blogs are NOT formal
 - a. Can use slang language such as "kids"
 - b. Again, talk about anything as long as you keep it appropriate